

Rocky Mountain Arsenal National Wildlife Refuge More Than Doubles in Size

Successful completion of largest Army land transfer in 2006 wins praise from Cabinet secretaries and Congressional leaders.

U.S. Secretary of the Interior Dirk Kempthorne and EPA Administrator Stephen Johnson joined Army officials Friday in celebrating the expansion of the Rocky Mountain Arsenal National Wildlife Refuge in Commerce City, Colorado.

"This is another important milestone in the successful clean up at the Arsenal, and an outstanding example of the partnerships that make the National Wildlife Refuge System one of our nation's most important conservation assets," Kempthorne said.

The refuge, which is located about 10 miles northeast of Denver, grew from 5,000 to more than 12,000 acres this fall, following the successful completion of the Army's largest land transfer in 2006. The refuge is home to more than 330 species of wildlife, including the American bald eagle, and includes important wetland and short-grass prairie habitat.

The celebration included members of the Colorado Congressional delegation as well as roughly 250 community leaders, employees and refuge volunteers. After signing symbolic land transfer documents, officials unveiled two photographs illustrating the transformation of the site and planted native vegetation in the Egli Heritage Garden, which was named after a homesteader family that farmed the land in the decades before World War II.

For the past 14 years, the Army has worked with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and Shell Oil Co. to convert the Arsenal from an environmental clean-up site to a premier urban national wildlife refuge in the heart of Colorado.

"The Army is proud to turn this land over to the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service to more than double the size of the urban refuge," said Tad Davis, Deputy Assistant Secretary of the Army for Environment, Safety and Occupational Health. "Together, the public and private sector have met the highest environmental and safety standards, and are giving this land back to the community as an asset for generations to enjoy."

The U.S. Army opened the Arsenal in 1942 to manufacture chemical weapons as a deterrent against the Japanese. The Army later leased facilities to private companies, such as Shell Oil Co., which produced agricultural chemicals at the site. Manufacturing stopped in the early 1980s, and the site was added to the EPA's Superfund list in 1987.

The refuge was officially established in 2004, after the EPA certified that the clean up of 5,000 acres of Arsenal land was complete and took the land off the Superfund list. The EPA recently approved removing another 7,000 acres from the list, which allowed the U.S. Army to transfer the land to the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service to manage as part of the Rocky Mountain Arsenal National Wildlife Refuge.

The \$2.4 billion clean up of the Rocky Mountain Arsenal is almost two-thirds complete. By the time the work is finished, another 2,500 acres will be added to the refuge, which will make it one of the largest urban wildlife refuges in the nation.